THE CHILDREN OF THE ABYSS.

ETHEL LE MÉE.

"To the unknown many who might have soared,
But never had a chance."

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To aid the foundation of

"HOME" MISSIONS,

whose object is to change the slumland of England into clean and happy homes.

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THE CHILDREN OF THE ABYSS.

Ye whose hearts are fresh and simple,
Who have faith in God and Nature,
Who believe that in all ages
Every human heart is human,
That in even savage bosoms
There are longings, yearnings, strivings,
For the good they comprehend not;
That the feeble hands, and helpless,
Groping blindly in the darkness,
Touch God's right hand in that darkness,
And are lifted up and strengthened;
Listen to this simple story . . . .

Five words chosen from the compassionate lines of the poet would be a very fine text upon which to preach a perfect humanitarian sermon: "Every human heart is human." The external surroundings may reach the very epitome of dissimilarity, but the human heart with its "longings, yearnings, strivings," is common to humanity, and proclaims the unity of the Human Family, and the claims of each individual member of that family to the goodwill of the rest of the members, particularly the compassionate claims of the weaker element upon the stronger. "The feeble hands, and helpless, groping blindly in the darkness," we must endeavour to change into strong hands fighting freely in the light the Battle of Life

under the broad banner of Humanity. We must make these common human "longings, yearnings, strivings," of the less fortunate, no longer vague and purposeless, but definite and purposeful for a comprehended good.

The Children of the Abyss, the Unknown Many, live their unlovely lives, the physically and morally distorted and depraved products of their environment, where decency and health and cleanliness are well-nigh impossible. They bear the results of centuries of uncleanly living in their stunted bodies and perverted souls. They are cramped with the chain of poverty. They exist in the darkness of appalling ignorance, and possess no incentive to wrench themselves free from the slums that nurture them. They pass on in their turn the same heritage of corruption to those who come after them. We must break the chain and create the incentive. Charity, and I wish to lay special stress upon this point, that ONLY in winter months semi-feeds the half-starved body and EVER leaves the environment and the morals alone, does no durable good, It momentarily eases the rubbing of the chain but does not aim at removing the chain itself. We want, and must have, an organisation that will change the whole face of slumland and stimulate the denizens to better things. As long as there are those human hives of filth so long will there be the same vitiated and abandoned souls. It is good, but not good enough, to merely send donations to soup kitchens in bad times. We must bravely enter the battlefield of slumland and besiege the citadels of Dirt and Disease.

It has long been an ideal of mine, this betterment of the slum home, this weeding of the Forgotten Land, this charitable organisation that will embrace every inmate of the slum home from mother to daughter, from father to son, the little and the big

that will help the poor to help themselves, that will lead them gently and firmly out of the wilderness; that will show them the heritage of one and all, the right everyone has to as fair and free a start as possible in the race of life; the equal rights of all to enjoy their share of the beauties of a beautiful world.

I have had the inestimable joy of contemplating many fair and gracious sights both in our own lovely England and on the Continent. Often when I have sat amid golden gorse in a summer land by a summer sea, with only the rippling of the water or the inland song of a lark to break the sweet silence, I have thought of the days I have spent amid the narrow, fetid, unlovely streets of slumland. I have thought of those toiling without hope, blind to all beauty, soul crushed in their abysmal regions of filth and stagnation. I have imagined, as I listened to some deep-toned bell pealing from a hillside church standing above pasture lands, outlined in a bright blue sky, of the toilers pouring into stifling factories. The song of the skylark is not for them, all the beautiful pink and white of May their eyes may not see; they may never walk upon the summer carpet of green and gold—they with their human right to fresh air and flowers and song of birds and forest shades, and the cool, restful hand of nature upon their heated, toil-worn brows. We often take out the young children nowadays to be taught by that greatest of Educators—Nature. I think we ought to sometimes take out the older people and let them taste the old Cree squaw's idea of Heaven: Trees covered with blossoms and purple shadows where tired women could rest.

I think I know what you will say: That the poor would not care for a stretch of country fair as the Garden of Eden; that a public-house, with plenty of time to lounge inside, would fulfil their ideals of

bliss; that they have no wish to be clean and no desire to live nobly. The idyllic existence to them would consist of days filled with a minimum of work and a maximum of food and drink. To which I can reply: That if this is indeed so, the more ashamed ought we, the civilised, the educated and the clean, to be, to know that there are sisters and brothers in our family so senseless to shame, so blind to beauty, so ignorant of their mission as men and women, and that the sooner we open their eyes to the depth of their degradation the better it will be for those who come after. But how indeed can we expect the people of the Abyss to sing songs of *Zion* in a strange land? In the bleak and barren places of the Forgotten Land there is no soil for the cultivation of the fragrant flowers—the Dreams and Hopes and Delights of life.

In approaching the vast labour of Slum Betterment we require an infinite patience. If, with all our advantages of heredity and environment, our education has been but gradual, theirs, in their black regions, where the body is distorted and the soul quenched, will be more gradual. Our commencement, too, must be with the mother. The child can no more live by bread alone than the man. What a child wants is a mother, and it is a mother in the fullest sense of the words that a slum child is more in need of than bread. The slums are more paupers in Morals than Materials.

The influence of women! Who can deny its strength? Who can gainsay the Titanic power early home influences exert in a man or woman's after-life? Joan of Arc shaped the destinies of France to better ends than did Napoleon. In our own dear England the glorious and noble example of good Queen Victoria is an inspiration for all time. She has been designated the incarnation of the wisdom, truth and justice which have done so much

n building up the British Empire. The Moral name f Victoria to her children over seas drew the colonies earer to the throne than did the Material advan- ages of statecraft. Her wisdom won their loyalty s the genius of Alexandra never could have done. he was identified with every step in their moral and aterial progress. And just as the Queen had power o shape the destiny of her wider family, so each nother has the same power to make or mar her hildren's lives.

Natural environments affect character. Miss llen Thorneycroft Fowler, writing on life in the Midlands, points out how the dwellers in the moun- ains are more romantic and artistic than the dwellers n the plains. Of special weight and worth, for my oint in view, is her insistence upon how the pictures hat photograph themselves on the mind of a child ave their effect upon that child's future thoughts nd actions. What then, we may ask, will be the ature of a man or woman born and bred in the gliness and dirt of the slums? Science, that stern nentor, tells us that we are what our forefathers nade us, *plus* the action of circumstances upon our- elves; and in like manner children inherit the good nd evil both of body and mind that is in us. Upon ne Men and Women of To-day devolves the imperi- us duty of the cultivation of the best and the sup- ression of the worst, so that the People of To-morrow uffer not at all at our hands. It is because the nowledge that is gained and the habits that are cquired abide with us, determining character, that ne importance to ourselves and to others of learning hat is true and of cultivating what is good, is para- nount. This will be one of the earnest endeavours f the "HOME" MISSIONS.

George Gissing, one of the greatest friends and mpathisers the poor ever had, seemed to feel the reat future import of early impressions and their

big after-factor in life. In his *Private Papers of Henry Rycroft* he speaks of his early pleasure in Nature. Even during that strange time when hardships and passions held him captive far from any glimpse of the flowering earth, he could be moved, and moved deeply, by a picture of the simplest rustic scene. In his visits to the National Gallery he would stand long before such pictures as "The Valley Farm," "The Cornfield," "Mousehold Heath." "In the murk confusion of my heart," he wrote, "these visions of the world of peace and beauty from which I was excluded—to which, indeed, I hardly ever gave a thought—touched me to deep emotion. Let me but come upon the poorest little woodcut, the cheapest 'process' illustration, representing a thatched cottage, a lane, a field, and I hear that music begin to murmur. It is a passion, Heaven be thanked, that grows with my advancing years. The last thought of my brain as I lie dying will be that of sunshine upon an English meadow."

It may seem that I am laying too much stress upon the power of environment, but I feel it necessary to insist upon the matter because, as yet, hardly anything has been done in this direction. No moral progress is possible so long as we allow men and women to remain in slums that are regarded by friendliest foreigners as a blot upon the scutcheon of a banner that has generally in golden letters proclaimed itself in the Vanguard of Humanity, and Progress, and Civilisation.

The *Baptist Times* of a recent date contained this pertinent paragraph: "If one-half the money now spent in charities were devoted to real remedies for poverty, to enabling the poor to supply their own needs, double the good would be done that is done by gifts to the destitute. Is there a statesman who can and will give England a real and influential lead in solving the problem of Poverty?" To which I boldly

respond: A statesman may not, but the "Home" Missions will. The "Home" Missions and no statesmen may ever hope to entirely abolish Poverty, but the "Home" Missions may make poverty less unlovely, easier to be borne, may gradually lift it out of the mire of filth and ignorance, may humanise, educate, and cleanse. The Well-to-do and the Educated have too long a start in the Race of Life. Poverty has weighted itself with drawbacks we must remove. We must clear the course and make the running fair, and the route brighter. There may always be the rich, and there may always be the poor, but there need NOT be such ignorance, such dirt, and such hovels.

The poor are their own salvation. We show the way they must follow. We must go brightly into the darkness and stir into activity the dulled consciousness. We must, by degrees, draw them out of the abyss with the tender tugging strings of a boundless sympathy, and a tireless striving. Have you noticed how slowly and surely the bare brown earth lightly clads itself in living green at the touch of radiant young Spring? A musical instrument cannot play of itself. If it has become mildewed with long years of neglect it requires the gentle hand of a musician to tune it and softly draw forth the music that lies in the dumb keys. The heart-strings want the same tender touch. Play upon them sweetly and they will respond with melody. We want women with the delicate comprehension and the sweet soul of that exquisite singer, Antoinette Sterling. She loved best to sing to those who had sinned and were enduring punishment, to charm the suffering into pleasure of those who lay on beds of pain. She loved to sing the sweet old ballads of home and country. She found the right key to progress when she said: "I want to appeal to people's hearts. I want to stir up the sweetest of

the old memories that are lying folded away in everybody's heart, and bring out, if I can, all that is best there. It is only the dear old simple ballads that can do it." Another aspiration of the "Home" Missions—to bring out the best in the heart in a healthy environment.

George Gissing, to whom we have referred, was a pessimist, but, unhappily, he mirrored Truth. "As the world is ordered," he wrote, "to lack current coin is to lack the privileges of humanity, and indigence is the death of the soul."

What wonderful pen pictures he has given us of Poverty in its stronghold. He shows us a London cemetery in the East End. A country churchyard touches the tenderest memories, and softens the heart with longing for the eternal rest. The cemeteries of wealthy London abound in dear and great associations, or at worst preach homilies which connect themselves with human dignity and pride. Here, on the waste limits of that dread East, to wander among tombs is to go hand in hand with the stark and eyeless emblem of mortality; the spirit fails beneath the cold burden of ignoble destiny. Here lie those who were born for toil, who, when toil has worn them to the uttermost, have but to yield their useless breath and pass into oblivion. For them is no day, only the brief twilight of a winter sky between the former and the latter night. For them is no aspiration; for them no hope of memory in the dust; their very children are wearied into forgetfulness. Indistinguishable units in the vast throng that labours but to support life, the name of each, father, mother, child, is as a dumb cry for the warmth and love of which Fate so stinted them. The wind wails above their narrow tenements; the sandy soil, soaking in the rain as soon as it has fallen, is a symbol of the great world which absorbs their toil, and straightway blots their being.

Another equally pathetic picture is that of children in Lambeth dancing round a street organ, playing in front of a public-house set in the midst of the dim burrows of poverty, in the unmapped haunts of the semi-human. Only in such a setting, he tells us, will you know the significance of that vulgar clanging of melody; a pathos of which you did not dream will touch you, and therein the secret of hidden London will be half revealed. The life of men who toil without hope, yet with the hunger of an unshaped desire; of women in whom the sweetness of their sex is perishing under labour and misery; the laugh, the song of the girl who strives to enjoy her year or two of youthful vigour, knowing the darkness of the years to come; the careless defiance of the youth, who feels his blood and revolts against the lot which would tame it; all that is purely human in these darkened multitudes speaks to you as you listen. It is the half-conscious striving of a nature which knows not what it would attain, which deforms a true thought by gross expression, which clutches at the beautiful and soils it with foul hands.

Again three lines of my introduction come to mind with force and pathos:—

> In even savage bosoms
> There are longings, yearnings. strivings,
> For the good they comprehend not.

The "HOME" MISSIONS will be the vehicle of comprehension. We shall prepare the way by starting directly with the home. John Ruskin had been asked to contribute to the purchase of the Alexandra Park and would not. He wished the HOMES to be comfortable and refined. "Your first business is to make your homes healthy and delightful: then keep your wives and children there and let your return to THEM be your daily 'HOLY-DAY.'"

We might ask how a *siècle* animated by the

spirit of science and tormented with enterprise leaves the cities of travail to sweat and stagnate in a sordid heap of living beings.

How eagerly we followed the march of the British towards the sacred city of Lhassa! With what interest we read every description sent us from the various correspondents travelling with the column! And then when the weary way was accomplished and the magical city reached, what did we find?—Humanity huddled abjectly in squalid smut-begrimed houses and Lhassa itself filthy, undrained, unpaved, and towering grandly above all this misery the Hill Palace of Potala, whose golden roofs, shining like flames of fire, were landmarks to the devout Buddhist pilgrims. The mighty Metropolis of London is the Mecca of all English speaking people. The towers of Westminster, and the dome of St. Paul's, inspire them with awe and admiration. Within those walls lie so many of the great and good who were foremost in the Van of Progress. Yet beneath the shadow of the splendid towers of the Abbey and the solid dome of the Cathedral lie, so we are told by Mr. F. C. Constable in *The Prize Social Success* more crime, ignorance and filth of life than from end to end of the poorest country in Europe. This is cruel reading to us, who are so proud of our mighty Empire, that eclipses all that Rome had ever accomplished and all that Carthage had ever dreamed, and London, in our eyes, was the supreme stone crowning the stately edifice.

It is well sometimes to see ourselves as others see us. Here is a French opinion on the long plaint of misery that mounts from the opulent Great Britain, and reveals to them the profound misery of the inferior classes that no one seems to have been able to remedy. It is not drunkenness that is the plague of England, but there is another more terrible still: The English working-man's wife. What is, indeed,

the most general cause of the drunkenness of the English working-man? It is the incapacity, the carelessness, the idleness of his wife, who doesn't know how to draw the best part from anything, who wastes the provisions and the money, makes useless or unskilful purchases, and knows neither how to conduct a household nor to prepare for her husband and children a suitable meal. The wife of the English working-man has generally been a working woman herself, or a servant. From the time she is married she has only one desire: to do nothing. The clothes of the man and those of the children are neither mended nor brushed from the first day until they fall from their backs in unclean rags; the room is dirty and the meal uneatable. The man, driven from his home by the carelessness of his wife, goes to the public-house and drinks. All this is very sad to relate, says the Parisian worthy, but it is unhappily attested by those who have seen the English working-man close to, and who are unanimous in avowing that, seven times out of ten, his profound misery is due to the incapacity and the expensive tastes of his wife.

As a picture of the position of the British working-man, in the common acceptance of the term, it is too ridiculous even for contradiction; but suppose we enter the abysmal regions of slumland—what then? In many cases only too true. Mr. Robert H. Sherrard, of London, and Mr. H. Lee J. Jones, of Liverpool, men of unique experiences, would, I believe, if they were approached upon this subject, bear witness to the disgraceful incapacity of the wife and mother. In only too many cases we must confess that the majority of men and women drinkers are driven to the public-house through their own moral incapacity. There, alone, can they momentarily forget the misery of their position. How many times have we heard the following speech, cruel in

its apparent justice : " If the workers drank less they would be able to save up for their old age." Nobody, or nearly nobody, says that drunkenness is caused by the misery, economical, intellectual, and moral, in which a too great number of our workers is abandoned. Certainly, in time, drink comes to aggravate this triple misery and render it irremediable. But still it is not enough to preach at the workers to find in themselves the necessary moral spring. An exterior succour then imposes itself.

Again, these remarks upon drunkenness do not refer by any means to all the inhabitants of slum-land. Harold Begbie, in his finely pathetic pictures of London Life, shows us many beautiful, even noble, traits in low life. He portrays the wonderful silent patience of the poor, and to him, it seems the most terrible of all things to consider—that they do not complain. They know nothing of the joy of life, nothing of high hope, and nothing of even decent living. For them art has no existence, pleasure no meaning, and nature spells only appetite. There are thousands in our proud and splendid land who never open a book, never see a picture, never cherish an ideal, to whom life has no other significance or intention in the world than the daily earning of a little mouldy bread.

I feel sure of this: That the reason why so much charity has been but as a jug of water thrown into the sea of misery is because it has been wrongly applied, because it has appealed to the material side entirely, and never to the moral. It has clothed the body but left the soul alone. It has fed the body physically, which was well done, and permitted it to go on starving morally, which was not well done. It has helped them to stay in the Wilderness and given them no incentive to bring them out. It has stood outside the abyss and held out sugar-plums. It has never gone into the depths, never helped

them to help themselves, never stimulated the moral nature, never bade them look beyond, or induced them to stand up in the strength of moral manly and womanly dignity. It has given them tracts instead of soap, theory instead of practice. It has clothed ignorance, but not removed ignorance, not given it the knowledge to make it able to clothe itself. This is to be another great aim of the "Home" Missions.

I was reading recently a few paragraphs containing quotations from great minds on the True Conception of Human Progress, and was inspired by the following: Our splendid cities—with the sky scrapers that laugh old Babel's tower to scorn, with the wealth that makes the piled-up coffers of old Tyre, Rome, and Memphis look too small to count —what do they really amount to? The answer depends upon these other questions: How many clean, happy homes are these cities able to show? How many manly men and womanly women? How much personal and civic virtue that cannot be bought for gold?

A plain old Roman once made this wise speech: "I am not opposed to wide streets and fine dwellings; but before we go further let us make ourselves what we ought to be. Better it is to have small houses and great souls than great houses and small souls." This is the dearest ambition of the "Home" Missions: To build up throughout the slumland of England clean and happy homes. To teach the real joy of labour, the doing of the work to hand bravely for the work's sake.

There need be no such thing as poverty, has been said, and Mr. W. Crooks, M.P., in a recent speech affirms that there is wealth enough in the country for every man, woman, and child, this day to be living in decency and comfort, with a sufficiency of food and clothing and a house fit to live in. But, alas!

poverty is a solid fact. Of this, however, we may be sure, that there need be no such thing as Squalor, Dirt or Ignorance. If poverty, it should be a bright and wholesome poverty, drawing the best it can out of life, not weakly sinking deeper into the abyss. Money we must work for, Nature is given to us. We each have a right to claim our share in her delights. Poverty need not muzzle itself with ignorance and then bury its muzzled nose in dirt. It must come up out of such an atmosphere. We must draw them out of that environment and make it impossible for those who come after to return to it. We want to re-create and re-form. Immediate relief should be the precursor of a permanent cure. Whilst removing the effect we should uproot the cause. To bandage up the effect of a cause and leave the cause rampant is poor logic. That the poor are as many as ever is sufficient condemnation. Instead of preaching religion into dulled ears, we should bring a little more humanity into degraded lives. We should, to set a poem into prose, show that God would be more pleased by some sweet human use than by the learned book of the recluse; that sweeter are comrade kindnesses to him than the high harpings of the seraphim; that more than white incense circling to the dome is a field well furrowed and a nail sent home.

Sir Oliver Lodge, speaking a short time ago in Liverpool, said: That human life was not meant to continue as it was now in city slums; nor was the strenuous futility of mere accumulation likely to satisfy people when once they had been educated; the world was beautiful, and might be far more widely happy than it had been yet. Those who had preached this hitherto had been heard with deaf ears, but some day we should awake to a sense of our true planetary importance and should recognise the higher possibilities of existence.

The question may very well be posed here: How are we going to approach our ideals? I will give as broad an outline as possible, the details will be arranged by far cleverer heads than mine. We shall found "Home" Mission Settlements in every poor centre. There will be work-rooms and club-rooms for women and girls. The women will be taught, by competent and willing teachers, how to cook, especially in the preparation of infants' food and the proper method of infant feeding; how to cook suitable dinners for their husbands and children; how to scrub and wash and iron and keep their houses clean. To raise the standard of cleanliness we shall follow the example of Lady Warwick, and offer a good emulation prize each year for the cleanest home in a settled area. We shall try the system of co-operative meals, an idea strongly entertained by one of our future chief advisers and helpers, Miss Vevey Webster, a clever journalist and distinguished lecturer, who will be able to give us the labour of heart and brain. If co-operation in the matter of meals could be successfully arranged, the money now spent upon ill-cooked and improper food could be invested in something good, nutritious, and body building.

Whilst Mr. Sherrard was pursuing his investigations in Manchester for the materials for his excellent articles, "The Child Slaves of Britain," a man who had lived in Ancoats nearly all his life told him that: "Swarms of children in this district are fed on filth, meats from the cookshops, things out of tins. The fathers do not fare much better. Wages are very low, the wives can't or won't cook." Bad food, overcrowded homes, at work for years on the British race, have reduced its stamina. Sir John Gorst attributes much of the physical degeneration of our children to defective nutrition. Doctors ascribe this not alone to the poverty of the parents, but to

their ignorance as to what is proper food to give children. One of our earliest cares would be to institute a special invalid kitchen with its benefits strictly limited to the old and sick, who for a penny a meal would obtain properly cooked food. The "menu" would include a plentiful supply of beef-tea.

The young girls we would train for domestic service, and bring ourselves into direct communication with households desiring good and trustworthy girls. I may add that we shall be just as particular in the selection of a mistress as the latter may be in the choice of a girl. It will not then be necessary to send abroad for domestics, to Norway, North Germany, and Normandy and Brittany. There are many good girls in the slums who only want to be taught and to be given a chance.

Then we would have a clubroom open every night in the week for young unmarried women of the poorest quarters. Not only should we arrange suitable recreations and suitable discussions upon leading social events, in which we shall hope to be assisted by our most prominent public women, but we would form debating societies and would encourage the young women to provide their own evening's entertainment, let them be their own hostesses, let them speak and debate upon topics chosen by themselves. For women who know the difficulties of existence, who know to what extremities they can be pushed by misery, who, themselves, suffer from want of money, will understand better than those favoured by fate the special wants of their particular class. If possible I should like to do the same for the youths of the same quarter.

One step further I may pledge myself to personally. I will open free classes for promising youths and girls who are backward in some special educational necessity and the loss of which hinders their social progress.

For children, once a week, we would inaugurate "Happy Evenings" similar to the successful ones commenced in 1891 in London by Miss Heather Bigg, until now it is one of the most influential as it is the "smartest" charity in London. We, too, would study the individual child character and have a Quiet room and a Noisy room, a Toy room and a Painting room, a Doll room and a Fairy Tale room. No doubt, as in London, the school-houses of slumland would willingly be lent for this purpose.

To the "HOME" MISSIONS the poorest, the most degraded shreds of humanity may bring their little or big troubles. Advice will be freely given in every difficulty, and help as far as in our power, in every need. The only lights in the darkness of slumland shall not be the lights of a public-house, the only sympathy shall not be the wordy consolation of a church.

Now, I can imagine, comes a very important question. Where is the money to come from to found such Missions? In whatever towns the Missions were founded we would ask every householder to give *one penny*, from most houses we should no doubt receive more, but we should ask for no larger amount, and be very pleased with ONE PENNY! We should form a local committee of lady citizens and let them organise a house-to-house collection.

And the dearly-looked-for ultimate end of the "Home" Missions is this—a stronger, cleaner, better educated poor. And, perhaps, then—then, when we hear there is not sufficient work for all, and a want of living room is deplored, why, then I shall turn my eyes towards a land where there IS room to live —to Canada, where there is living space for nine hundred millions of people. My heart hopes that we shall find a minister patriotic enough to send out, at the expense of the Government, sturdy young colonists willing to carry the flag of Imperial Britain

across the seas. For the "Home" Mission is an Imperial Mission in the best sense of the terms. Even if the Moment will not produce the Man why despair? We can enter into direct communication with the colonists already there, and, by degrees, ease the burden of over-populated England. I am full of hope in the future, if we only work, and not idly wait, for a good time coming. Work is a dignity, dirt a disgrace, and knowledge a great demolisher.

There is a system I should like to see extended here, and that, on the Continent, has been blessed with good results. In certain cases Society has been authorised to take away the paternal power from parents incapable of exercising it. These children were put *en pension* in the homes of agriculturists or of artisans. Very many of them, either through cause of their hereditary antecedents, or through privations which they had endured before being taken away, were tainted with physiological misery. Rural life is the most sure means of curing these young people, fortifying them and of forming a new temperament. In villages the moral medium is more salubrious, even as the air breathed is purer. The pupil has less temptation, less facilities of debauch. Lost in a crowd he would escape the surveillance that in a village is exercised upon the other, which is often indiscreet, sometimes annoying, but the sum total healthful, for the need of the esteem of the people near whom one lives is a powerful element of morality.

It frequently happens that parents reclaim a child whom misfortune had obliged them to abandon. Upon their request, the Public Assistance must, providing they receive certain guarantees, restitute. This act, which seems only natural, the recognition of an imprescribable right, is sometimes an incomprehensible and cruel act in the eyes of the child and of

the foster-parents. They received a youth weak, condemned, ruined for life. They have made a robust being, they have tended in a word to attach him again to life. He has taken in this family, in this soil, to the depths of his nature, the blood that has nourished him and the sentiment of security without which nothing of the man can grow. He is of that cottage, and of that country. The strangers will be those who reclaim him—his parents those whom he would quit. The actual law which ignores this case of conscience leaves no latitude to the Assistance. It has produced such heartrendings that it is purposed to put forward some project that will provide that the return of the child to its parents depends entirely and uniquely upon the interests of the child.

The desire of the "Home" Missions is to promulgate better home interiors, and better moral interiors in the inhabitants of the homes. There are, I know, many who will be inclined to sneer at the idea of any moral feeling among the poor. But I think that number will be mainly confined to those who only know them from without and nothing of them from within, and who have never struck the goodness that lies embedded in the dross of dirt and degradation and that only requires digging out. Is not the kindness of the poor to one another proverbial?

I always feel sorry at the cold approach of Winter. I think of the old, old scenes of Winter misery I have witnessed, chiefly in connection with the Food and Betterment Association of Liverpool. I have seen so many sad little human pictures that when I search for one, others thrust themselves forward until the mind become a picture gallery of sorrowful scenes. I have seen groups of solitary shivering humanity waiting in the cold and wet outside the F.B.A. House for the Homeless. I have taken the register there and marvelled at the many miles mis-

fortune had sent her children to find that temporary port in a storm. I have seen the mute pain that burns deep down in sunken sockets, and the heavy lines ruled on a man's brow by the ruler of pain, and the terrible falling in of the jaws of the lean faces of the starving.

I have been out with the F.B.A. free coffee barrow along the dock road and seen our famished fellow men clutching cups of coffee and tearing at the huge pieces of bread and butter the quicker to cram it into that aching void within. How terrible it is indeed to think that sorrow and sadness stalk grimly through the night wearily watching for morning. For there is always hope in a new-born day. It may hold for them, also, life's sorry failures, some store of promise.

I have given an entertainment to rag-pickers. The strains of song, how strangely they softened even the hardest face, it seemed like a sudden gleam of the music and the dreams that had been crushed beneath the toil of ages, the weight of centuries. I saw, too, eyes that were sharp, and keen, and bright with peering into dust heaps, suddenly grow hazy and troubled because a woman's voice was relating about a wife and mother going blind, and ragged sleeves swept away furtive tears. It was easily moved to mirth, too, this joyless crowd, and it laughed loudly and longly at the mishaps of a certain "James," but their hearts went out to him, too, and they cried out to him to "come again!" Then when tireless time pointed to eleven o'clock they stood and sang "Auld Lang Syne," that well-beloved old Scottish song with its sweet sentiment of memory, and the old men received tobacco, and the women tea, and marched out into the cold and dark to take up the burden of life again. I think it is Anatole France who said that Society is based upon the patience of the poor.

I have seen the gladness of little ragged children at their day's outing to the seaside, little faces lit at last with the joy of living. I have watched the human hive passing along the sand, then the joyous bound, the hurry and the scurry, the eagerness to laugh and shout and stretch their limbs in the wide spaces and healthy air. I have seen little famished faces bent over steaming soup that will momentarily still the hunger cry of those who gaze upon the Promised Land of Childhood from the Hill of Pain, who never enter the Paradise of Youth, but look upon life as through a glass darkly, catching but glimpses of joy through the eyes of others.

I remember with pain those touching articles by Edgar Wallace, describing the thousands of homeless men and women in London in Winter, their fearful sufferings out in the cold, foodless and hopeless: tales of children's misery, of slow starvation, and of the terror of the "House" among the poor. Old men and old women will bite their lips and suffer the pain of hunger sooner than be on the parish, and what is more deplorable, the sick will die rather than lay themselves open to the visits of some callous parish doctor to whom the sick poor are as so many ailing cattle.

"It is no use giving you medicine," said a parish doctor to an old woman of sixty-eight whom Edgar Wallace visited lately. "You'll get no better whatever I give you. You've got valvular disease of the heart."

One of the saddest cases I think I have ever read about, and that always brings the tears to my eyes, was in connection with London's greatest hospital on Christmas Day. Early in the morning a little band of nurses, like earthly angels, passed from ward to ward singing sweet old simple Christmas carols. Then Father Christmas made his rounds. The students dressed up as clowns; conjurors and knock-

abouts made merry. There were pantomimes in miniature and comic songs. And yet, while the students sang and the patients laughed, two quite young babies and an old, old man passed to their Eternal Christmas Day. But there was a living tragedy sadder even than those tragedies of death.

In a bright ward decked like a fairy palace, "grown ups" and children were cheering as three strapping students, dressed as Royal Hussars, sang "To-night we'll merry be."

In the darkness of the adjoining ward there lay a man alone in a sea of empty beds.

"To-night we'll merry be; to-night we'll merry be," sang the bold Hussars.

And tears dripped from the eyes of the lonely man and nestled in the hollows of his cheeks. For he had been for nine years in pain that knew no ceasing. The surgeon's knife awaited him on the morrow, and no friend from the outside world came to press his hand. And it was Christmas Day.

There is a little scene that always comes back very clearly to my memory and that, indeed, might stand forth as a text for the "Home" Missions. I was with Mr. Lee Jones, who was collecting amongst the poorest poor their willingly given offerings towards a statue to be erected to one of their greatest benefactors—Monsignor Nugent. In one slum dwelling we entered lay a mite of a baby in a wooden box that had been bought by the parents for a penny. It was sweetly smiling in its sleep, as peaceful and as happy as a Queen's child could have been in a cradle all of gold. That little head, empty of thought, may one day contain the brain of a great and good man, I thought, IF PROPERLY TRAINED.

In that notable book by H. G. Wells, *Anticipations*, is stated very plainly a very true fact. The war of the coming time will really be won in schools and col-

leges and universities, wherever men write and read and talk together. The nation that produces in the near future the largest proportional development of educated and intelligent engineers and agriculturists, of doctors, schoolmasters, professional soldiers and intellectually active people of all sorts; the nation that most resolutely picks over, educates, sterilises, exports or poisons its people of the abyss; the nation that succeeds most subtly in checking gambling and the moral decay of women and homes that gambling inevitably entails; the nation that by wise intervention, death duties and the like, contrives to expropriate and extinguish incompetent rich families, while leaving individual ambitions free—the nation, in a word, that turns the greatest proportion of its irresponsible adiposity into social muscle, will certainly be the nation that will be the most powerful in warfare as in peace, will certainly be the ascendant or dominant nation before the year 2,000.

To that we may reply with the noteworthy critic, Mr. Alex. M. Thompson, that we believe that the generation to come will recognise that the most "efficient" nation must be that possessing the largest proportion of "efficient" persons; that the way to make "efficient" persons is to afford opportunity of "Efficiency" to all; that the opportunity of "Efficiency" consists in healthy surroundings, sufficiency of food, freedom from sordid care, and leisure for study and thought: and that such opportunity will be most largely secured by those nations whose activities are least burdened by the incubus of useless and demoralising idlers.

In the same way, I think, that the answer to the Slum Question is Education—primarily in Domestic Economy, Cleanliness, Cooking, and a Clearer Consciousness of the Meaning of Motherhood.

To one remark, however, of Mr. Wells we must take exception as good altruists, that is the passage:

" export or poison the people of the abyss." I think we should try to reclaim before resorting to such an exaggerated expedient. In a barbaric society, says Edward Clodd, or among the civilisations where infanticide was practised, weaklings like Newton and hunchbacks like Pope would have been left to perish: modern civilisation spares them, and humanity is enriched by their genius. Thought becomes fixed on the evolution of goodness instead of on the origin of evil: time is set free from useless speculation for profitable action: evils once deemed inherent in the nature of things, and therefore irremovable, are accounted for and shown to be within our power to extirpate. The " Home " Missions would recognise with Edwin Markham that the stolid, stunned and brutal man with no light within his brain is not the Being the Lord God made and gave to have dominion on sea and land, and that

> Down all the stretch of hell to its last gulf
> There is no shape more terrible than this
> More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed.

It is the false doctors of Humanity who grow fat and sleek upon the social diseases of the world, and, unlike true doctors, do not cure the ills upon the proceeds of which they build their stately edifices.

It is indeed good to sorrow and strive for the CHILDREN OF THE ABYSS, and to remove, as far as in our power may be, the sharp stones out of the way of the children's feet winding along the dusty road to death. We are beginning to find the ONE-NESS of the Human Family. According to Sir Oliver Lodge no science maintains that the whole of our personality is incarnate here and now; it is, in fact, beginning to surmise the contrary and to suspect the existence of a larger transcendental individuality, with which men of genius are in touch more than ordinary men. We may be all partial incarnations of a larger self.

And again: We are rising to a conviction that we are a part of nature, and so a part of God; that the whole creation, the One and the Many and the All-One, is travelling together towards some great end; and that now, after ages of development, we have at length become conscious portions of the great scheme and can co-operate in it with knowledge and with joy. We are no aliens in a stranger universe governed by an outside God; we are parts of a developing whole, all enfolded in an embracing and interpenetrating love of which we too, each to other, sometimes experience the joy too deep for words, and this strengthening vision, this sense of union with Divinity, this, and not anything artificial or legal or commercial, is what science will some day tell us is the inner meaning of the redemption of man.

The problem of the new time will be less how to appease misery but how to prevent it. In a passage of much eloquence Robert Blatchford, the great Socialist, implores us to look through the slums, and see what girlhood, childhood, manhood, and womanhood have there become! Think what a waste of beauty, of virtue, of strength, industry, and of all our power and goodness that go to make a nation great, is being consummated there through ignorance and bigotry, and evil laws, and false principles of trade and policy.

How many Arkwrights, Stephensons, Bunyans, Wedgwoods, Turners, and Carlyles have sprung from the common people? Think. Then, how many great hearts and brains, as well as beautiful and strong forms, are yearly lost to us in the slums and factories? We know that beauty, and grace, and charity, and high intelligence, in spite of every adverse power, are to be found in profusion amongst the poorest classes; but we do not seem to think that every woman or man ruined or slain by poverty,

ignorance, and vice is the loss of so much bone and sinew, of so much courage and skill, of so much delight and glory to the nation! Think what men and women are under the best conditions, and you will be ready to rend your garments as the ruinous waste becomes apparent. Is not one Darwin or Milton or Ruskin, one Brontë, one Florence Nightingale, one Jenny Lind, or Mrs. Siddons, worth a price above rubies?

Have we not had sufficient evidence of the powerlessness of pity without action, the pity that momentarily alleviates misery but in no way prevents, or remotely prevents, its recurrence? Squalor and starvation are the diseased limbs of humanity no surgery of state-craft has ever known how to heal. We want certainly to provide for the present, and prevent for the future. We want to strike hard home at the environment and make it impossible for others to fall into the same hopeless slough. We cannot at one fell swoop do anything. We want infinite patience for an infinite work. We may not abolish poverty, but we can abolish the fetid and unwholesome surroundings and destroy all the fatal parasites of poverty. A "Home" Mission, that is our aim, that will purify and elevate the family ideal and give to one and all a good and clean start in life. We must have, I repeat, a boundless endurance, and a ceaseless toil for gradual changes. What evolution has taught us is the gradual ascent of life. Not many noble nor mighty are called to the enduring tasks of Nature. It is the minute agents, unresisting and widespread, that have been the efficient cause of much that is grandest in earth structure.

Others shall sing the song,
Others shall right the wrong,
Finish what I begin,
And all I fail of, win.

What matter I or they!
Mine or another's day,
So the right word is said,
And life the sweeter made?

Hail, to the coming singers!
Hail, to the brave light-bringers!
Forward I reach and share
All that they sing and dare.

I feel the earth move sunward,
I join the great march onward,
And take by faith, while living,
My freehold of thanksgiving.

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